



UTILIZING SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENT INFORMATION AT A TDM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENT AND TDM:

1. What is safety and risk assessment?

‘Safety and risk assessment’ refers to a structured method of gathering and analyzing information necessary to identify immediate safety threats, and to classify the levels of risk for re-abuse or neglect which are present in families served by child welfare. Safety and risk assessment decision making tools typically assign risk ratings based on research reflecting the predictive value of the presence of certain facts or clusters of facts. Information is collected to develop a picture of a child’s maltreatment, including type, frequency and severity of occurrences. Additional details about the child, information regarding the adults in the household, and family functioning are evaluated and strengths which have relevance as protective factors are also gathered and analyzed. Both risk and safety issues are captured by examining elements, individually and together.

2. What is the difference between assessing safety and assessing risks at a TDM?

Assessing safety at a TDM requires examining what must be done immediately to protect the child from abuse/neglect. The focus is on identifying the factors that place the child at danger of serious harm at the present time, as well as the presence of protective factors to counterbalance threats to safety. **Assessing risk** at a TDM involves predicting the likelihood of future harm due to abuse/neglect by the parents. Assessing risks requires examining past and present behaviors of the parent(s), both positive and negative, to reasonably foretell the likelihood and severity of future harm to the child.

3. How is safety and risk assessment used in TDM?

TDM provides the forum for child welfare staff to discuss risk and safety issues with family and others, and to participate in placement-related decision making. The concept of risk assessment is the foundation for all TDM discussions regarding child removal, reunification or other permanency planning decisions. It is important to remember that all risk/safety discussions should occur within the broader context of child well-being, which must always reference children’s emotional needs and the trauma of separation.

4. How much family history must be discussed at a TDM?

It is essential that all factors that impact upon the health, welfare and safety of the child are considered when making a placement decision, because such decisions must be grounded in careful assessment of immediate safety issues and predictions of future risk. In order to make such an assessment, the TDM team must examine past events and history, as well as the present situation that resulted in the need for a TDM. All history relevant to abuse and neglect of the child, as well as any history of A/N by every adult with access to the child, is important because the past is sometimes our best predictor of the future. Examining the history of a family’s past must also include circumstances when they were functioning healthily. If the TDM discussion only focuses on the present circumstances, the future well-being of the child may be in jeopardy since the magnitude of future risk, or the potential to build upon past strengths, may not be understood. The challenge for a TDM facilitator is to ensure thorough discussion of concerns while remaining strengths-based and solution-focused.

5. What are the safety and risk issues that must be decided at an Initial Removal TDM?

Participants at the Initial Removal TDM must decide how to protect the child from serious harm at this time—can the child safely remain home with protective supports? Or must the intervention include temporary removal from the home while remedial services are provided to the parents? Discussion at an Initial Removal TDM focuses on the precipitating event and immediate safety issues in addition to an evaluation of the factors that put the child at risk of future abuse/neglect. Strengths must be examined in the context of their relevance as protective factors in relation to immediate concerns. The assessment of future risk is based upon both the current factors and history.

6. How is safety and risk assessment used at a Reunification TDM?

When a child is removed from his/her parents' custody, the goal is usually to reunify him/her as soon as the parent(s) can provide adequate care, protection and stability. A recommendation for reunification is based upon an assessment that risk has been reduced during the child's out of home stay: i.e. that the parent(s) are currently able to provide safety, and the risk of future A/N is low enough to justify return of the child. Discussion at a Reunification TDM focuses on the present familial situation to assess for safety. This includes an examination of the effectiveness of services or other interventions in eliminating the safety concerns that were present at the time of removal, and a prediction of no/low risk of future serious abuse/neglect.

7. A summary of the safety and risk issues for different types of TDM meetings:

SAFETY ISSUES		RISK ISSUES	
Initial Removal TDM			
DETERMINE: Present serious harm and/or dangerous conditions			High probability of future serious abuse/neglect based upon present situation and past history
FOCUS: Child—what needs to be done now?			Parent(s)—what must change for the future?
DECIDE: Immediate response to present situation	and		Priority services to address risk/needs and reduce future risk of abuse/neglect
Reunification TDM			
DETERMINE: Significant positive impact on concerns by services or otherwise that resulted in placement and home presently safe			No/low probability of future serious abuse/neglect
FOCUS: Child— safe return to parent(s)' home			Parent(s)—have successfully addressed all issues that harmed and put child at risk of A/N
DECIDE: Parent(s) able to provide safe home for child at this time	and		Positive prediction of parent(s) ability to maintain safe, nurturing, stable environment long-term
Other Permanency Plan			
DETERMINE: Little or no change by parents regarding concerns that resulted in placement and safety issues remain			High probability of future serious abuse/neglect
FOCUS: Child— unsafe to be in parents' care as issues that endanger child persist			Parent(s)— traits, behaviors, conditions remain that indicate likelihood of additional serious risk of harm if child in their care
DECIDE:			Long-term protection plan in nurturing, stable environment

8. What are the Facilitator's responsibilities regarding safety and risk at a TDM?

- Ensure all safety issues and risk concerns are shared and thoroughly examined
- Ensure discussion of risks and safety issues is understandable
- Ensure impact of risk behaviors upon child is clear, especially to parents: "connect the dots"
- Ensure specific and behaviorally descriptive explanations of concerns and expectations
- Ensure all views regarding safety and risks are heard, clarifications provided and questions answered
- Ensure family strengths, particularly those that address safety and risk issues, are recognized
- Ensure thorough discussion of history remains strengths-based and solution-focused
- Ensure all adults in home and having child access are assessed and discussed
- Ensure "reality test" of ideas to address both immediate safety needs and future risks
- Ensure TDM decision provides safety in least restrictive/intrusive manner for child: always raise the question of balance between safety and emotional trauma of separation

9. What are the benefits of using a safety and risk assessment tool?

Safety and risk assessment tools offer an objective, comprehensive format to aid social workers in fairly and consistently evaluating safety concerns and predicting the degree of future harm that may result without successful service intervention. Future risk of additional harm is suggested when identified elements are not effectively remedied based upon an analysis of historical and current information. The tool can assist social workers to organize and structure their TDM presentation. Use of an assessment tool contributes to the recognition of strengths that can be used to impact upon safety, risks and needs. The tool provides a source to measure change during CPS intervention and to evaluate progress. Finally, safety and risk assessment may provide a method of countering personal bias, which is believed to be a contributing factor in the overrepresentation of children of color in out of home care.

10. Does the Annie E. Casey Foundation endorse the use of a particular safety and risk assessment tool for TDM?

No, AECF does not endorse any particular tool, but encourages the utilization of safety and risk assessment tools that promote comprehensive and objective evaluations. One must remember that any tool has limitations and its effectiveness and usefulness depends upon the skills of the assessor and the resulting quality of the information shared. The social worker and the TDM facilitator should work together, using the collected information as the framework for a discussion, to develop understanding with the family and other participants.

11. What is a social worker expected to present/be prepared to discuss at a TDM?

The social worker who requests the TDM, as case manager, must be able to summarize the highlights of the safety and risk assessment tool in a way that is succinct and understandable to lay people. S/he must share information (current and historical), offer ideas, and propose recommended solutions. S/he must also listen and consider the information and ideas of other participants. The worker is typically the source of much of the information that the team must examine and analyze when deciding how to provide safety and protection for the child, although in an emergency meeting, there may be limited information available. The worker and facilitator must ensure ample opportunity for the family to offer their views and guidance.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS:

The following suggestions are for social workers to use in sharing risk and safety tool-related information at a TDM. This guide assumes the primary ‘audience’ for the social worker’s remarks is the child’s parent(s). Strive to communicate in the clearest and most engaging language possible.

GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION OF RISK AND SAFETY ASSESSMENT TOOL INFORMATION AT INITIAL REMOVAL TDM

SW RESPONSIBLE TO:	SAMPLE LANGUAGE:
Explain risk and safety assessment concepts, and process or tool used, to family (and other participants)	“As a social worker, it’s my job to make an assessment about your child’s safety. I use a tool that’s been developed by experts in the child welfare field called <u>risk/safety assessment tool name</u> . It assists me, as I collect information and examine issues about your situation, which I can then compare to what is known about the factors that tend to endanger children generally. We will be talking about the information I’ve gathered about your family and discuss why I feel there are serious safety and risk issues, using the safety/risk assessment tool. I will also share information I’ve gained about your family’s strengths. I want you to add to all of this discussion as it unfolds. If you don’t understand what I’m saying, please let me know so I can clarify.”
Disclose all safety issues	“I’ve identified some safety issues that are of immediate concern because they could seriously harm <u>child’s name</u> . They are...”
Share all risk concerns (In an emergency many sites allow partial completion)	“There are some significant risk elements I’ve identified as I’ve gathered information regarding the ____ family. These suggest the possibility of future harm to the children. They are...”

Describe impact upon child	"I'm concerned about <u>safety/risk element</u> because it affects <u>child's name</u> in this way: _____"
Explain what must change in future	"For <u>child's name</u> to be safe and protected, I believe these changes must occur: _____"
Discuss strengths of family system, particularly those able to mitigate or lower specific risks identified	"Although there are certainly issues that concern me about the _____ family, I also see a number of strengths which might serve to counter-balance some of the concerns. They are ..."
Provide succinct history of child's A/N	"Our agency's prior contact with the family has been ... I have also determined that the family had previous involvement with a child welfare agency in <u>county/state</u> . The information we received is..."
Give information regarding A/N of any other child by adult with access to child	"I have assessed all the adults residing in the home and determined that..."
Discuss relative—support & availability/appropriateness, if placement necessary	"I have contacted <u>relative's name</u> and found that s/he is able to..."
Share current & previous relevant services used to resolve concerns	" <u>Parent's name</u> has an intake appointment scheduled for _____ at _____. I believe this service is a priority because..."
Discuss child's attachment and harm of remaining in parents' care vs. emotional damage of placement	" <u>Child's name</u> is very attached to his/her mother. I have considered the effect temporary removal from her care will have on him/her and weighed it against the trauma of placement and believe that..."
Give recommendation and invite response and examination of your plan of action	"I am recommending temporary placement of <u>child's name</u> while we work to However, I hope everyone here will offer your thoughts about my recommendation and discuss if there is any other way <u>child's name</u> can be kept safe and protected."

GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION OF RISK AND SAFETY ASSESSMENT TOOL INFORMATION AT REUNIFICATION TDM

SW RESPONSIBLE TO:

SAMPLE LANGUAGE:

Explain risk/safety assessment to family (and other participants)	"You may recall that your worker used a method of evaluating the level of safety and future risk called <u>risk/safety assessment tool name</u> when <u>child's name</u> left your home X months ago. The safety and risk assessment tool assisted us to collect information and examine issues that put <u>child's name</u> at risk of serious harm. Today I will be using the same format to discuss what has changed since <u>child's name</u> came into placement and to explain why I am now recommending that your child return to your care and custody. If I say anything that you don't understand, please let me know so that I can clarify."
Explain present level of risk of future A/N	"The significant risk and safety issues present when <u>child's name</u> entered care were these: _____ and the level of risk was _____. Today I would assess them very differently, at a risk level of ..."
Discuss how risks and safety issues have been addressed	"Let's look at each of the serious risk and safety issues that were present at the time <u>child's name</u> was removed, and review what has happened to eliminate or reduce them significantly."
Address compliance with court orders	"Court orders included these: _____. <u>Parent's name</u> has successfully complied by..."
Explain any remaining concerns	"We still must address... We plan to manage this issue by..."
Discuss services and supports utilized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide evidence of progress due to services- using behaviorally specific examples • Discuss services during transition and after NOTE: ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE RATHER THAN SIMPLY GIVING A ONE-WAY PRESENTATION DURING THIS PART OF THE MEETING	"During the past X months, Mr./Ms. _____ was able to make positive change by _____. <u>Parent's name</u> completed the service and is demonstrating success by ... A written report from the service provider states... We have a commitment from...to continue involvement for a minimum of X months."
Discuss assessment of all adults in household and with access to child	"The persons residing in the home currently are... I have talked to and assessed everyone in the home and involved in caregiving and found..."
Describe living conditions, financial	"The present home conditions are... <u>Parent's name</u> will support the

situation, etc.	family by..."
Discuss plans for child: child care, health (medical and dental), educational etc.	"When <u>child's name</u> returns home, arrangements have been made with...to care for him/her when <u>parent's name</u> is unavailable. This child care plan is safe because... Medical care will continue to be provided by... <u>Child's name</u> will remain in his/her present school as s/he has resided in the same school district while in placement."
Discuss family and community supports	" <u>Parent's name</u> has received support from... They are here today to demonstrate their continuing commitment to assist <u>parent's name</u> . I know they wish to speak about their future involvement."
Address current and/or anticipate needs/concerns	"We still need to address... We plan to ... Also <u>parent's name</u> knows that in the future if ...should occur, s/he can..."
Share child's attachment and feelings about reunification	" <u>Child's name</u> has told me that... His/her caregivers are present today and can also express what <u>child's name</u> has said about going home."
Offer recommendations from GAL, caregivers, service providers (if not present)	"Due to other responsibilities, <u>service provider</u> could not attend today but provided a written recommendation that I will read." I would like to invite <u>foster parent or kin caregiver</u> to share their input about this family's readiness to reunify..."
Provide court hearing schedule or other timeframe needs	"There is no court hearing presently scheduled, but if this recommendation is supported, we will file..."

GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION OF RISK AND SAFETY ASSESSMENT TOOL INFORMATION WHEN RECOMMENDING TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS

SW RESPONSIBLE TO:

SAMPLE LANGUAGE:

Explain safety and risk assessment to family (and other participants)	"You may recall that your worker used a method of evaluating the level of safety and future risk called <u>safety/risk assessment tool name</u> when <u>child's name</u> came into the agency's care, X months ago. At that time, these things made it unsafe for your child(ren) to stay home: _____. The safety and risk assessment tool assisted us to collect information and examine issues that put <u>child's name</u> at risk of serious harm. Today I will be using the same format to discuss the issues that continue to be critical concerns. If I state anything that you don't understand, please let me know so that I can clarify."
Explain present level of risk	"The level of risk at the beginning of this case was _____, because of these issues: _____. It continues to be high because..."
Discuss compliance with court orders	"The court ordered... To-date <u>parents' names</u> have not complied with..."
Address lack of evidence that intervention has reduced risk (behaviorally specific)	"During the past X months, Mr. /Ms. _____'s case plan required them to _____. <u>Parent's name</u> did not accomplish the improvements we hoped for because _____. A written report from the service provider states... This issue remains a serious concern because it affects the children in these ways: _____..."
Explain why you feel risks/safety issues have been inadequately addressed	"While we have attempted to provide services and supports to address ..., it remains evident as demonstrated by...that Mr./Ms. _____ have been unsuccessful in eliminating the safety concerns present when <u>child's name</u> entered care."
Discuss child's attachment and anticipated emotional damage or harm if permanent separation, vs. risk of harm if parental rights not terminated	" <u>Child's name</u> misses his/her parent very much. I have considered the effect not having his/her parents will have on <u>child's name</u> if parental rights are terminated, but because of the very serious risk due to..."
Discuss services offered/utilized, including efforts to support and aid parents to fulfill expectations	"We made X appointments in an effort to enroll <u>parent's name</u> in... <u>Parent's name</u> refused to participate even when the provider offered to... We continue to feel this service is critical because... A written report from the service provider states... In addition to these formal service opportunities, we attempted to provide support to the parents through the use of these more 'natural,' or neighborhood-based efforts: _____. However..."

Explain efforts to maintain parent/child relationship during child's placement	"While <u>child's name</u> has been in the agency's custody, we have scheduled weekly visits. <u>Parents' names</u> have attended ____ out of ____ visits, and the interaction I observed was ..."
Share information regarding relatives as placement/custody options	"I have contacted all relatives identified on the genogram and found that... If parental rights are terminated, I will recommend..." (comment on continuing contact with birth family.)
Discuss plans to find a permanent family and child's future if TPR	"If parental rights are terminated our plan to provide permanency will be..."
Discuss child's wishes for future	" <u>Child's name</u> has said to me... His/her caregivers are present today and can also express what <u>child's name</u> has said about going home."
Offer recommendations from GAL, current caregivers, service providers (if not present)	"The GAL, regrettably was unable to attend today's meeting, but has provided a written recommendation that I will read." "I would like to invite <u>foster parent or kin caregiver</u> to share their input about this family's readiness to reunify..."
Provide court hearing schedule or other timeframes needs	"A court hearing to review custody is scheduled for..."
Discuss rationale for extension of temporary custody in lieu of TPR at this time, if appropriate	"While serious concerns remain, <u>parents' names</u> have made significant progress in services. Their positive improvement is evidenced by... Because of this progress, I would recommend we request an extension of temporary custody in the belief that within the next 6 months I will be able to recommend reunification of <u>child's name</u> ."